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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Almighty God, make us instruments of Your love. Lord, use our Senators today as ambassadors of reconciliation. Direct them in their work, surrounding them with Your gracious love. Let all their plans and purposes be in accordance with Your holy will. May they desire to serve You and country with faithfulness.

Lord, enlighten them with Your wisdom so they will find solutions to the problems that challenge our Nation and world. Make them good stewards of their calling, guiding them to use their influence for Your glory.

We pray in Your gracious Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HIRONO). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

BUILD BACK BETTER PLAN

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, last week, President Biden unveiled a framework for his Build Back Better plan that will make historic investments to help millions of working- and middle-class families achieve the American dream in the 21st century while taking new and bold steps to tackle the climate crisis.

Over the weekend, I continued diligent, assiduous negotiations with my Senate colleagues, the Speaker, and the White House as Congress prepares to take action on the President's proposals. We are still talking and working through important details and making good progress, and I want to thank all my colleagues for their diligence, their expertise, and their commitment to getting something done.

As I have always said, nobody is going to get everything they want in the deal, but we will have some things that everyone wants. Even as legislative text continues to get finalized, the framework itself already contains very, very good and important things that will make a tremendous difference in the lives of the American people. It will help the middle class stay in the middle class. It will help those struggling to get to the middle class get there a little more easily. It will really help Americans in ways that Washington has not helped Americans in quite a few years.

One way it will help is childcare. Tens of millions of American families struggle with the unaffordable cost of taking care of their children. For some families, childcare can cost over \$10,000 a year, forcing parents to make the painful choice between going to work and looking after their kids. The consequences for our economy, with its

shortage of workers, for parents, and for our kids are severe and long-lasting.

The framework, with its historic investments in childcare and universal pre-K, would finally—finally—provide working- and middle-class families with the urgently needed help they need so parents, particularly women, can enter the workplace, earn a living, and not worry about whether their kids are being well taken care of.

The President's framework also makes long-overdue progress in the fight against climate change. It contains the largest investment to address the climate crisis in American history.

American families from one coast to the other are in desperate need of relief from the consequences of climate change. Wildfires in the West make it harder for people to breathe, especially those with conditions like asthma. Flooding in the Midwest destroys crops and homes and local economies and poisons fragile ecosystems and even the safety of drinking water. Extreme storms in the winter make it harder for those without proper heating to stay safe, as we saw tragically in Texas. Of course, the hurricanes and tropical storms on the east coast have caused regular flooding, the likes of which we haven't seen in a long time occurring as recently in the Mid-Atlantic as this weekend.

We have an opportunity—a real opportunity—to take unprecedented action to protect Americans against these threats. While there will be so much more to do, this is a bold step in the right direction. As the President spoke before the world today in Glasgow, his framework is proof the United States is ready to once again lead by example against the greatest existential crisis of our time.

There is so much more to like in this framework. As I have said repeatedly, when this bill is passed, it will be fully paid for and reduce—reduce—inflationary pressures—something that has

● This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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been affirmed by many, many economists. It will be fully paid for and, at the same time, will reduce some of the bottlenecks and high costs that people have. It will lower people's costs in many ways. Particularly, we are making regular progress to lower prescription drug prices as we work to refine the agreement.

The framework will also make healthcare more affordable, cut taxes for working and middle-class Americans, and most importantly, provide long-sought ladders for families to climb up to the middle class and give them the stability needed to stay in the middle class once they get there.

It will lower costs for people in many different ways—one of our main goals. This will be just what the American people need, and it will not be—will not be—inflationary.

So the announcement last week from the President brought us one step closer toward our goal of delivering help to the American people at every stage of their lives. We are going to keep working this week to get this legislation over the finish line. Democrats are committed to rewarding the trust that the American people have placed in us.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, Madam President, on judges and nominations, last week, the Senate confirmed seven—seven—more judges to serve lifetime appointments on the Federal bench.

Just about all of them were people of color; all but two were women. Among them were more Federal defenders, civil rights lawyers, election experts. They will bring sorely needed diversity to the judiciary—not just personal diversity or demographic diversity, as important as that is, but professional diversity as well, adding to the breadth and width and depth of knowledge possessed by the courts.

It is no longer a bench that we are appointing that is simply prosecutors or partners in large law firms, but many, many others from walks of life with different and needed perspectives on the Federal bench.

Today, we are going to pick up right where we left off. Later this afternoon, we will vote to confirm Beth Robinson, of Vermont, to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, and Toby Heytens to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

A former clerk to the late Justice Ginsburg, Mr. Heytens is a veteran of the Justice Department and is the current Solicitor General of the Commonwealth of Virginia. He is regarded by both sides of the aisle as a superbly skilled lawyer and an impartial thinker.

In Justice Robinson, who has spent 10 distinguished years on the Vermont State Supreme Court, the Senate is presented with another experienced, dedicated, and historic nominee. She would be the very first openly gay

woman to serve not just in the Second Circuit, but in any Federal circuit court in the country—another barrier torn down in the halls of justice. We are proud of tearing down those barriers and making the bench more inclusive and more like America. I look forward to her confirmation today.

In the weeks and months to come, Senate Democrats will continue pressing ahead to bring balance back to our Federal courts with diverse, mainstream, qualified, and impartial jurists.

JOHN R. LEWIS VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, Madam President, on the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and cloture, the fight to protect our democracy from voter suppression and election subversion continues in the U.S. Senate. Later this evening, I will file cloture on the motion to proceed to the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, setting up a vote to take place on Wednesday.

This bill, which my friends, Senators LEAHY and DURBIN, worked assiduously to put together, will restore the key protections of the Voting Rights Act—the crowning achievement of the civil rights era—that were wrongly gutted in one of the worst decisions the Supreme Court has made in a long time—in 2013, the Shelby decision—done by a conservative majority on the Court.

Specifically, the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would update the preclearance protections that prohibited States with records of voter suppression from making changes to election law without Federal approval.

Recent history makes absolutely clear that we need these protections on the books. Thanks to the Shelby decision, we now live in an era of increased voter suppression in the United States. After that decision, States like Texas and North Carolina, sadly, sprang into action to make it harder for minority, younger, and lower income people to vote. Many more States followed years later, and we are suffering the consequences of that decision to this day.

Few of the Justices had thought, I believe, that we didn't need these preclearances because there is no more voter discrimination. Lord, were they wrong. We must reverse their awful Shelby decision.

If there is anything that merits debate here in the Senate, it is protecting the precious right of Americans to participate in our elections. Since its original passage, the Voting Rights Act has been updated five times—five times—with support from both Democrats and Republicans. We should, likewise, proceed this time around on this time-honored measure.

I want to make clear: If the Senate votes to proceed on to the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, I am prepared to offer a full-fledged debate befitting this great Chamber. Re-

publicans will be given the chance to raise their objections, to offer amendments, and to make changes to the bill. I know that both parties have serious disagreements on this important issue, so we want to hear from the other side what they propose. But for that to happen, we need to start debate first; we need to vote to allow the Senate to work through its process; we need 60 votes simply to say we will debate this issue. We will get a chance to see what happens this week.

Time is really getting short for the Senate to take action on voting rights before Americans go to the polls in the 2022 elections. It is essential that we restore preclearance protections before the start of next year, when States are set to consider another round of restrictive voting rights laws when their legislative sessions start in the spring.

Indeed, the dangerous and draconian Republican laws we have seen in 2021 are only the beginning if this body doesn't take action, and they are a very serious threat to our democracy—one of the greatest threats to democracy that has come around in a long time.

So I hope both parties will proceed on legislation that has long enjoyed bipartisan support in this Chamber. Our democracy demands we act.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, well, the American people are hurting. Inflation just hit another 30-year record high. Families are paying skyrocketing prices for everyday needs. The murder rate across the country just recorded its biggest jump ever.

But here is what the Biden administration has focused on: handing out six-figure and seven-figure payments to illegal immigrants.

A few years back, liberal interest groups started trying to sue the U.S. Government on behalf of illegal immigrants. They wanted American taxpayers to pay out legal damages because of the conditions some people faced as they tried to break into our country illegally.

As a legal matter, these lawsuits were borderline frivolous. Our government was all but certain to win the suits, but this administration wants to stand down and voluntarily pay out massive damages: "The U.S. Departments of Justice, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services are considering payments that could amount to close to \$1 million a family"—\$1 million a family, about a half a million dollars per adult, and about a half a million dollars more per child.

American families are having to anxiously budget for gas and groceries, but